

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
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MEMORANDUM TO: J. C. King

FROM: **L** **J**

SUBJECT: Caribbean Legion

We are transmitting herewith a report on the Caribbean Legion prepared in OCI in response to the request of **L** **J** through RQM/OIS.

This report covers the substance of all data available, to the best of our knowledge, in Washington. Further detail can be supplied if you desire development of any special aspects of this information.

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OCI-2212

15 December 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR: DAD/CI

SUBJECT: Caribbean Legion

1. It is requested that the Latin American Branch prepare a brief report on the Caribbean Legion covering as far as possible the following points:

a. A brief history of the movement (about one paragraph).

b. Current strength and centers of organization and training.

c. Arms and sources of supply.

d. Orientation (is it essentially mercenary?)

e. Leadership (strength, ability, capability to command allegiance, identification of leaders).

f. Would it be an asset to a liberal or leftist government in the area in case of a revolution against that government? How soon could it be mobilized and trained? Total potential strength? Liabilities or weaknesses?

g. Could it be bought for support of a revolution against such a government? If so, how valuable would it be to any group it might support?

2. Deadline date for this request is 18 December 1953.

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Chief, RQM/OIS

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OCI - 2212

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Chief, RQM/OIS

DATE:

FROM : Chief, Latin America Branch, OCI

THROUGH: Chief, Western Division, OCI []

SUBJECT: RQM/OIS memo to DAD/CI of 15 December 1953, requesting information on the Caribbean Legion.

1. Attached is a report on the Caribbean Legion prepared in answer to the questions posed in the subject memo.

2. It is the opinion of the Latin America Branch of OCI that the Caribbean Legion is no longer in existence as an effective organization, but that both "democratic" and "dictatorial" elements in the Caribbean area find it advantageous to maintain the fiction of an organized Legion in order to gain support and sympathy for their respective ideologies. Moreover, because the name "Caribbean Legion" does retain the prestige associated with its earlier, and relatively effective, organization, it seems probable that the name will continue to be used by ambitious revolutionary elements.

3. Recent unconfirmed reports speak of sizeable armed forces in existence in Guatemala. These reports cannot be evaluated without further investigation. However, it is possible that an organization similar to the Legion has been organized as the raw material for such an organization does exist in the various groups of exiles and political dissidents who are continually plotting to seize power in their respective countries. If organized, the group probably has the liberal-leftist orientation of the earlier Legion, but its immediate objectives and its leaders probably differ, inasmuch as the most important exile groups at the present time are Venezuelan and Cuban, in contrast to the Nicaraguan and Dominican elements which formerly dominated the Legion.

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Attn: G:OCI-2212

THE CARIBBEAN LEGION

(a) History

The irregular military group of several hundred exiles and political dissidents which took the name "Caribbean Legion" in 1948, was a significant factor in Central America - Caribbean affairs between 1947 and 1949. It had its origin in growing dissatisfaction with traditional dictatorial forms of government and in a fairly widespread desire for the development of political institutions along more democratic lines. During most of that period two rival power blocs - the "dictatorships" in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua and the "democratic" governments of Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Cuba - were competing for dominant influence in the area. The Caribbean Legion was a clandestine instrument of policy for the "democracies."

The Caribbean Legion was formed in March 1948 when various dissidents and political exiles from the "dictatorships" - many of whom had participated in the ill-fated Cayo Confites expedition against the Dominican Republic in 1947 - joined Jose Figueres (now President of Costa Rica) and gave him decisive aid in overthrowing the Communist-supported pro-Nicaragua Costa Rican government. At the close of the Costa Rican fighting the Legion was at its peak in power, prestige, and influence and its leaders were on intimate terms with Figueres and Presidents Arevalo of Guatemala and Prio of Cuba. In December 1948 President Somoza of Nicaragua, acting to forestall an attempt by the Legion against his government, promoted an invasion of Costa Rica by adherents of the deposed Costa Rican regime. The speedy intervention of

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the Council of the Organization of American States brought the invasion to a halt and Costa Rica was advised to remove the Legion from its territory. According to its leaders, the organization was disbanded in December 1948. Dissension within the Legion had been growing over the nature of the government it had hoped to establish in Nicaragua and the remnants of the organization apparently split into two factions, one remaining in Costa Rica and the other based in Guatemala. In June 1949 a group of revolutionaries drawn from the ranks of the Legion made a second abortive attempt to invade the Dominican Republic from bases in Guatemala. After this demoralizing failure, the revolutionaries dispersed and, reportedly, only a skeleton general staff remained organized in Guatemala for a while.

(b) Current strength and centers of organization

The Caribbean Legion, as constituted several years ago, is probably no longer in existence as an effective organization. Although investigations by US embassy officials and service attaches have resulted in no reliable evidence to substantiate the periodic rumors of the Legion's reactivation, recent unconfirmed reports speak of a sizeable armed force in Guatemala. Undoubtedly conditions which led to the Caribbean Legion's organization still persist: revolutionary plotting is endemic in the area and political refugees from repressive regimes, which have now increased to include Venezuela and Cuba, are floating about the area ready to join forces should a militant group such as the Legion be reorganized. Many of these elements are now concentrated in Costa Rica, the area's traditional haven for political exiles, and Jose Figueres, who worked closely with the Legion in its heyday and who still retains

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his bitter hatred for Caribbean dictators, was recently elected president of Costa Rica.

Several former members of the Caribbean Legion are now in Guatemala where they are employed in various capacities by the Guatemalan government or engaged in private business. Last June the US Embassy in Guatemala noted that "General Miguel Angel Ramirez, former Chief of Staff of the Caribbean Legion, and his aide Jorge Ribas Montes, were 'at loose ends' and obviously not engaged in 'any active enterprise such as the reactivation of the Caribbean Legion.'"

(c) Arms and sources of supply

During its period of activity, the Caribbean Legion obtained its arms and other supplies chiefly through the help of sympathetic governments: i.e. Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Cuba. Unconfirmed reports allege that an unstated supply of arms which formerly belonged to the Legion is now stored in Costa Rica. Presumably, these arms could be made available to former legionnaires or to a new and similar organization, but there is no evidence of such a development. In Guatemala two aircraft, a B-18 and a Lockheed Lodestar, which were formerly controlled by the Caribbean Legion, have recently been sold to a political associate of ex-President Prio of Cuba and were undergoing repairs. Rumors that the planes were to take part in an attempt against the present Cuban government have not been confirmed.

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(d) Orientation

The Caribbean Legion contained individuals of a variety of ideologies; a unified political philosophy never developed. In fact, political factionalism within the Legion was a major factor in its decline. The common goal was opposition to dictatorships and "the reinstatement of popular sovereignty in the Caribbean." Communists were generally unsuccessful in their attempts to infiltrate the organization though the Nicaraguan revolutionary, Edelberto Torres, who headed the leftist faction of the Legion, is now regarded as pro-Communist. There were undoubtedly some mercenaries in the Legion, though they do not seem to have predominated.

If a new group with Legion objectives should be formed, Communists would have an excellent channel for infiltrating that organization through the numbers of Communist-influenced exiles now in Guatemala. Prominent among these are Salvadorans, Hondurans, and Nicaraguans.

(e) Leadership

The leaders of the Caribbean Legion are now scattered throughout the Caribbean area and some have disappeared from view. The Legion's Chief of Staff, "General" Miguel Angel Ramirez, a Dominican, is now in Guatemala where he was reported last June to be in bad financial straits and engaged in operating a sawmill near Guatemala City. It was obvious to the US Embassy in Guatemala last June that he was engaged in no revolutionary plotting at that time. "General" Juan Rodriguez Garcia, a wealthy Dominican who was exiled by

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Generalissimo Trujillo in 1946, vowed to devote his life and his property to overthrowing the dictator, and led the ill-fated Cayo Confites expedition against the Dominican Republic in 1947, has not been heard from in recent years. Juan Bosch, another Dominican and top Legion leader, is now enjoying asylum in Costa Rica. The Honduran exile, Jorge Ribas Montes, reputed to be an excellent soldier, is in Guatemala working full time for the government airline. He was not engaged in any revolutionary plotting as of last June. Another Honduran who was formerly active in the Legion, Francisco Morazan, an unsavory character who took part in the assassination of the Guatemalan Chief of the Armed Forces in 1949, is now the private secretary of Guatemalan President Arbenz. Certain Cubans who took prominent parts in the Legion's affairs, particularly Eufemio Fernandez Ortega, are now engaged in revolutionary plotting to restore the presidency to deposed President Prio Soccaras. Enrique C. Henriquez, Prio's brother-in-law, may also be involved in this plotting. The Nicaraguans who were prominent in the conservative faction of the Legion, Emiliano Chamorro and the Arguello brothers, are now back in Nicaragua leading the opposition Conservative Party. Edelberto Torres, leader of the leftist Nicaraguans in the Legion, is now in Guatemala where he is prominent in various Communist front groups.

It is difficult to determine the leadership potential of these men at this time. Jorge Ribas Montes, "General Ramirez,

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and Juan Bosch are probably the most capable, but they now lack a dedicated following and a single "cause" to unify the various nationality and ideological groups which formerly comprised the Legion.

(f) Would it be an asset to a liberal or leftist government in the area in case of a revolution against that government? How soon could it be mobilized and trained? Total potential strength? Liabilities or weaknesses?

An evaluation of assistance from the Caribbean Legion to a liberal or leftist Caribbean government threatened by revolt would necessarily be speculative. The Legion was allegedly motivated by purely ideological considerations during its active period. It was comprised mainly of political exiles but contained some mercenaries. It can be pointed out that even were its manpower asset in defense of a sympathetic regime, its open toleration by the government in any country would be a diplomatic liability, inasmuch as official assistance to any exiles engaged in revolutionary plotting could always be interpreted as support for the overthrow of another government.

Despite reports that the Legion could be reactivated in as little as two months, there is no information here on which an estimate of required mobilization time or potential strength could be based. Such an estimate would minimally require reliable information, currently unobtainable, on: whereabouts and present attitudes of ex-Legionnaires, availability and type of arms and equipment, availability of

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recruits and non-Legion organizations for integration with the Legion, etc. Reports of unknown reliability received since May 1953 variously set Legion forces at 1500 to 6000. There is a strong inference that the main components of these forces are Cuban or Venezuelan exiles, committed primarily to the reinstatement of Prio in Cuba or Betancourt in Venezuela. Such reports often implicate the Guatemalan and Costa Rican governments as active in Legion activities, providing safe locations for training camps and supply depots. Moreover, unconfirmed reports allege that high officials of the Guatemalan and Costa Rican Governments have participated personally in negotiations among revolutionary factions. These include Foreign Minister Osegueda, President Arbenz, and former President Arevalo of Guatemala, and President Figueres of Costa Rica. Nevertheless, the Guatemalan government is careful to maintain good diplomatic relations with Cuba.

(g) Could it be bought for support of revolution against such a government? If so, how valuable would it be to any group it might support?

While the Legion probably does not exist as an armed force dedicated impartially to the defense of democracy, a group of revolutionaries exiled from one country could conceivably undertake a commitment against the government of another country in exchange for a promise of assistance in furthering personal or factional aims. Though the Legion was traditionally "liberal," and presumably therefore could not be bought to overthrow a liberal regime, there is

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currently insufficient information to show whether a new group under the old name could or could not be motivated by political or mercenary considerations to undertake an advantageous commitment contrary to the original concept of the Legion.

In the absence of confirmation of the identity and aims of any group proposing to call itself the Caribbean Legion, an evaluation of the Legion's role in the overthrow of a liberal or leftist regime could only be speculative.

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